

A Downtown Option for Benton County Court Facility Expansion



BENTON COUNTY COURT *feasibility study*

Hight-Jackson Associates PA | National Center for State Courts

The Benton County Court feasibility study established seven goals for new court facilities, stating that the new facility should be designed to reflect those goals.



Goal 1

The Court facility should convey an image of dignity and solemnity, and a sense that the facility is where justice is done. The architecture throughout the interior and exterior of the court facility should convey the image of the judicial system: dignity, strength, respect, and a sense of importance of the judicial system in the community.

- This represents a particular strength of G-2 as for decades the Historic Courthouse has been the face of justice in downtown Bentonville, and in the heart of our County seat.
- The Historic Courthouse represents history and culture in Benton County, with a complementary new building representing a bridge to the future.
- G-2 strikes a good balance of developing new and modern facilities while also maximizing the use of existing County buildings and square footage.



Goal 2

The Court facility should represent careful thought and consideration of the Court's operational and spatial needs.

- The general point of this goal is that the new judicial spaces wherever they are should promote efficient operation of the Court in terms of workflow, adjacencies, and proper zoning of functions.
- G-2 and 102 plans represent very different approaches, but both address this goal well, particularly with new ground-up buildings being a key part of both plans.

AREA CALCULATION GRAND TOTALS

Total New Building = 69,624 sf

Finished Floors = 54,951 sf

Unfinished (shell) Space = 13,973 sf

Pedestrian Bridge = 700 sf

Total Existing Building = 48,940 sf

Annex = 10,750 sf

Historic Courthouse = 26,766 sf

Tower = 11,424 sf

Total Additional Available Space = 12,000 sf

Old Jail = 12,000 sf



Goal 3

The Court facility should maintain flexibility to accommodate both short- and long-term space needs and contribute to the effective administration of justice.

- The NCSC Feasibility Study devotes significant attention to the future needs of the Benton County Court facilities through the year 2030. It's important to note here that there is a reason NCSC stopped at the year 2030....they are not comfortable speculating about growth data beyond that point, but that certainly does not preclude us from looking past that point as best we can.
- Among the salient points of the NCSC data is a projection that a new Circuit Judge to handle criminal cases will be needed between the years 2015 and 2020, and a new Circuit Judge to handle increasing juvenile cases will be needed between the years 2025 and 2030; an increase of two judges by 2030.
- Both plans address potential space needs beyond 2030; G-2 provides 8 downtown courtrooms, 7 Circuit Courtrooms in the new building along with the potential use of the Historic Courtroom as a non-criminal courtroom. So in other words, **3 downtown courtrooms beyond current needs plus the existing juvenile courtroom on Hwy. 102.** G-2 also provides for the future growth needs of the Prosecuting Attorney's and Circuit Clerk's offices.
- G-2 accommodates the NCSC projections through 2030 and also preserves space on the County campus for additional development beyond 2030.

Goal 4

The Court facility should offer an environment that is user-friendly and easily accessible to the public.

- Given the two very different plans on the table, this is a significant issue.
- This goal includes references to the need for high traffic public lobbies and circulation areas near the main entrance of the building, well-marked public directories, and signage; all of which are addressed by both plans.
- The central issue expressed by this goal concerns the creation of a facility in an environment that will provide the overall best service to the general public, the "customers" of the Courts, and Court employees.
- G-2 brings the Courts to where the people are - to the business and civic center of our County.
- The G-2 site in downtown Bentonville is just 2.3 miles from I-49, the area's primary transportation corridor.
- G-2 provides a high "quality of life" for all those who visit the Courts, with access to services, restaurants, shopping, parks, trails and other amenities.
- G-2 Downtown provides those same quality of life amenities and a sense of place for the employees of the Benton County Courts.

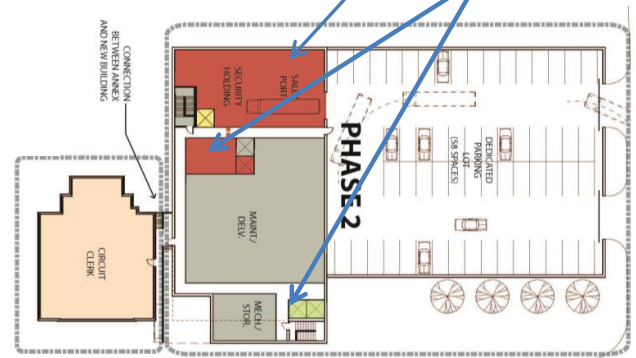
Goal 4 (continued)

- In turn, activity generated by court employees and customers represents an economic impact to downtown businesses of approximately \$3.4 million annually, per a University of Arkansas study. There is no question that removing the Courts from downtown Bentonville would have a significant and negative economic impact, and it would leave a hole in one of the most vibrant downtown areas in the country. Keeping the Courts in downtown Bentonville is also consistent with the significant work going on now in all the key downtowns of NWA.
- Providing adequate parking for all those who work for or visit the Courts also is referenced under this goal.
- We've pointed out that there are more than 700 convenient and free county and public parking spaces within a 5 minute walk of the existing courthouse. Plan G-2 provides for more than 600 spaces within one block of the proposed facility, including 66 secure parking spaces that would be located immediately adjacent to the new building and lays out a plan for 80 more spaces as needed.
- A recent survey of parking in existing parking lots within one block of the courthouse indicates ongoing excess capacity of approximately 32%.
- However, we acknowledge that there is a perception of inadequate parking. We believe that we can begin to change that perception via the installation of additional signage and a public information program slated for this summer.
- Bottom line, there is adequate free parking is located throughout downtown Bentonville and in the immediate vicinity of County facilities, both current and proposed.

Goal 5

The Court facility should offer a safe and secure environment for all citizens who utilize the facility as well as for the judges and court facilities who work within the facility.

- Both plans address the key concerns in this area, including:
 - Provide security screening at entry
 - Provide secure circulation separating general public, jury, detainees, and judges
 - Provide secure sally port and separate detainee circulation
 - Provide secure parking for Judges



Goal 6

The court facility, including all courtrooms, offices and other functional space, should be equipped with advanced technologies to facility the efficient administration of justice and improve the quality of service to the public

Goal 7

To embody the ideas of sustainable design practice and incorporate green building strategies

- Both of these goals can and should be addressed by either facility option.

Projected Costs and Square Footage

- The Feasibility Study did include preliminary cost estimates for three plans, two different downtown plans and a 102 plan with all three being in the \$50 million range.
- However, Hight Jackson Associates has been developing and refining a specific downtown plan, G-2, for more than a year now, and most recently Rik Sowell Associates has developed a modified 102 plan.
- The current estimated net cost of the G-2 plan is \$26.3 million including \$4.9 million in actual and offered grants from the Walton Foundation. We have provided specific construction and soft cost breakdowns by Hight Jackson for plan G-2.
- G-2 represents approximately 119,000 square feet of facility space, 70,000 in the new building and 49,000 in existing buildings. **Note:** The \$26.3 million estimate includes **the complete renovation of the Historic Courthouse** (\$8.9 million estimated cost), and also includes necessary property donations on NE 2nd street to accommodate the new building.
- There is an additional available space of approximately 12,000 square feet in the Old Jail for possible future use.
- The current lump sum estimated cost of the 102 plan is \$25 million.
- The 102 plan represents approximately 100,000 square feet of new facility space with room for expansion.



Thank You